



US Army Corps  
of Engineers

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# Strategy and Goals



INTERPRETIVE SERVICES AND OUTREACH PROGRAM (ISOP)

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**Project Operations  
Strategy and Goals**

# **ISOP STRATEGY**

The Interpretive Services and Outreach Program (ISOP) strategy is to achieve the goals outlined in ER 1130-2-428 and to conduct these efforts in an efficient and effective manner at the field level so as to enhance understanding of both the Corps and the public's roles and responsibilities. The ISOP includes the use of outreach in achieving these objectives.

# ACHIEVING ISOP GOALS

The Interpretive Services and Outreach Program (ISOP) Regulation (ER 1130-2-428) has been revised to make the program more efficient and effective. The revision contains newly developed goals for the ISOP.

This document contains ideas for implementing ISOP goals identified in the revised regulation.

The Corps has recognized for some time that interpretive services and outreach programs are integral to successful management efforts at the district and project levels. One of the objectives of the revision is to reemphasize the importance of the interpretive program and make it an effective part of Corps management efforts at all levels.

Every interpretive effort, be it a live program, a spontaneous verbal exchange,

participation in a career fair, a visitor center display, or an interpretive publication, should be based on one or more of the ISOP goals.

There are many creative ways Corps team members can use their skills and abilities to achieve the ISOP goals. Those who "do not have time" for interpretation are missing a golden opportunity to affect the lives and attitudes of the American people. While these opportunities may not "pay dividends" immediately, the long term positive benefits are worthwhile.

Following are the goals contained in ER 1130-2-428 and many ideas for achieving these goals. While the list is not all inclusive, it should be viewed as a tool for stimulating thoughts for other creative and innovative ideas.

# ISOP GOALS

## AND IDEAS TO MAKE THEM WORK

### 1. To achieve management objectives using interpretive techniques.

*"The value of outreach is to not only obtain public understanding of the resources we are managing, but to invite the public to become partners in management with us." Nancy Rogers, San Francisco District*

*"An end result of this is to assist us with management problems in a nonthreatening, pleasant manner as opposed to hardcore citation writing." Dawn Wiedmeirer, Seattle District*

Interpretation can be an invaluable tool to achieve management objectives. Here are some possibilities:

- Promoting resource stewardship can lead to benefits such as increased participation of volunteers to accomplish needed work, reduction of O&M costs, reduction of vandalism, enhanced visitor safety, etc. Examples include Scouting volunteer activities, T.R.A.I.L. Boss, Public Lands Clean-up Day, habitat restoration projects, adopt-a-stream/shoreline programs, and more.

- Interpretation can also promote voluntary compliance with environmental regulations. Examples include wetlands permits, regulations covered under the Environmental Review Guide for Operations, and Title 36

regulations. A solid visitor assistance program must include interpretation. Example: Lake Ouachita "Can You Dig It?" poster.

- Use interpretive signing to gain compliance in a positive way.

- Good interpretive efforts can correct misperceptions about the Corps, improve the agency's image, and build greater public and political support.

- Work to develop partnerships with cooperative associations, State, Federal, and non-governmental agencies to help accomplish management objectives, save money and improve efficiency. Examples include joint water safety programs, fire prevention (Smokey Bear) programs, litter reduction (Woodsy Owl), exotic species control (zebra mussels, knapweed, hydrilla, milfoil, etc.), and multi-agency visitor information centers.

- Using positive interpretive techniques, we can promote voluntary compliance with rules and regulations. Effective interpretation can help prevent costly compliance management and enforcement efforts.

- Effective preventive interpretive efforts up front may save time and money in the end. Examples include anti-litter campaigns.

**2. To provide environmental education to foster voluntary stewardship of natural, cultural, and created resources.**

*"The Junior Ranger program has also been very successful. It has a definite effect on developing an environmental ethic in young children. As opposed to a one shot program, they have tried to make the kids a continuing part of the staff..." Cheryl Jasper, New England Division*

*"Interpretation and outreach provide a medium for positive contact." Johnny Cantrell, Vicksburg District*

The first step towards stewardship is understanding. Interpretation, both on Corps projects and through outreach programs, can work toward developing that understanding. Our audience needs to know about the environment, cultural resources, Corps facilities and the role the Corps has played in their development, conservation, and management. We should provoke involvement, relate our message to visitors' lives and reveal meanings so visitors can decide for themselves about controversial issues. Here are some ideas!

- Educate the public about how they can help improve the environment, including voluntary compliance with wetlands regulations and stewardship of public lands and waters. Example: Interpretive programs about the benefits of wetlands, Eco-meets, visitor center exhibits on stewardship of public lands, brochures and school programs.

- Implement habitat management practices, signing and facilities in support

of national programs such as Watchable Wildlife.

- Provide factual information about the environment and the effects of interactions and reactions between humans and the environment. Encourage an educated and involved public. Encourage people to make up their own minds based on the facts.

- Interpret local impacts on global issues. Example: Interpret how disturbance of local ecosystems may impact migratory species.

- Develop or use existing curriculum for in-context learning opportunities to familiarize kindergarten through college age students with the multiple purposes of Corps water resources development projects. Train teachers to facilitate their own course work at Corps sites. Examples of existing programs are Project Wild, Project Learning Tree, and Teacher's Guides prepared by various projects and districts.

- Identify sites to support living classrooms such as environmental learning centers. Participate in special events such as Earth Day, Arbor Day, in-service training for teachers, Adopt-A-School programs, Scouting events, conservation fairs, and eco-meets.

- Develop a holistic approach to cultural heritage resource protection. Example: Interpret cultural sites that have been protected from disturbance. Emphasize that the artifacts in such sites may be more valuable if left in place.

**3. To incorporate the Corps Civil Works and military missions and accomplishments into**

## **Interpretive programming.**

*"We can demonstrate our engineering expertise to solve environmental problems and create solutions that give the public hope." Patrick McGinnis, St. Louis District*

*"It is the way in which we become a part of the community." Doug Blount, Mobile District*

Too often, the public is unaware of the contributions the Corps has made to infrastructure in the United States. Fewer still are aware of our contributions overseas. We have countless opportunities to include some of these accomplishments in our interpretive programs. Here are some suggestions.

- Interpret the big picture. Let local visitors know how their project is part of the Corps mission and how it fits into regional and national efforts.

- Be proactive in celebrating our successes! Tell the positive aspects of the Corps story, locally and nationally. Examples: Recognize and tell about Corps contributions to the Nation: flood control, navigation, recreation, hydropower, military construction, etc. Few visitors know the Corps role at Bunker Hill, Yellowstone National Park, construction in the District of Columbia, Kennedy Space Center, Mount St. Helens recovery, Hurricane Andrew recovery and Midwest flooding. We can make it relevant for everyone by comparing our story to what is going on in their hometowns.

- In telling the Corps story, coordination and cooperation between operations, public affairs, information management, engineering, safety team members and other functional areas (as

appropriate) are essential.

- Educate the public about what we are doing for the environment as part of the Army Environmental Strategy. Examples: Environmental Review Guide for Operations, wetlands management, wetlands regulation (the 404 permits), Watchable Wildlife and natural resources management.

- Provide education and mentoring for future generations. Examples: Adopt-a-school and Bring a Daughter to Work Day.

- Corps team members can enhance public knowledge and the image of Corps programs other than Natural Resources Management. Likewise, interpreters are frontline communicators, and can help communicate their audiences' concerns about and perceptions of the Corps back to other functional areas including public affairs, executive office, hydrology, safety office and others, providing a two-way communications channel. Examples: career fairs, dam safety responses after earthquakes and public meetings.

- Place Corps team members in offsite facilities to interpret the Corps story. Examples include tourist trains, steam boats and cruise boats that go past or through Corps projects. Corps team members can also present programs on the Corps story in leased recreation areas in partnership with managing agencies.

- Through interpretive services, promote public support for the missions and programs of the Corps of Engineers. Examples: Young Wetland Scientist, sports show exhibits and presentations to civic groups.

**4. To improve visitor and employee safety using interpretive techniques.**

*"I believe that our water safety school programs, beach demonstrations and picnic pavilion demonstrations have served to reduce our fatalities." Frank Walker, Vicksburg District*

*"Fort Worth district began holding local information exchange meetings... Now, outside groups approach the COE to form water safety councils, work on trails, etc. The success has been incredible." Ron Ruffennach, Fort Worth District*

Just as our award winning water safety program has proven the benefits of interpretation, other safety issues can also be addressed through interpretation and outreach. Opportunities for improving visitor safety include the following:

- Interpretation and outreach can help reduce/prevent public injuries and fatalities on Corps project. Topics include water safety, camping safety, bicycle safety, prevention of hypothermia and many others.

- Incorporate safety messages into interpretive programs and non-personal interpretation. Explain the reasons for rules and regulations in a positive fashion using interpretive techniques. Use interpretive signs to promote safety messages. Example: Posters and programs to reinforce "Pets on Leash" rules and regulation. Develop an information sheet about how to lock through safety.

- Produce program resources such as brochures, posters, promotional items, exhibits, public safety announcements and

videos to improve safety message delivery to visitors and outreach audiences.

- Work with local Corps safety offices to coordinate activities. Example: Invite safety officers to review plans for special events and accidents.

- Provide job-specific training (Motorboat, First Aid, CPR, Bloodborne Pathogens, etc.) to Corps employees.

**5. To use environmental education, partnerships, career development, recruitment, and special programs and events to encourage students to pursue careers in mathematics and science.**

*"We have a responsibility to play a part in helping to overcome scientific illiteracy, to promote understanding, and to prepare the next generation to deal with these issues." Nancy Rogers, San Francisco*

*"One of the most often asked questions, while doing interpretation is: "Did you go to school for that?" We are without a doubt linking kids with future career options and stimulating their interest in the sciences." Susan McKeon, Fort Worth District*

Corps team members should reach out to more diverse audiences to develop an educated and informed future work force. Corps team members should relate the story of the Corps to nontraditional audiences such as inner city youth, multi-cultural populations and non-English speaking populations as well as persons with disabilities. By participating in the education and mentoring of today's youth we can hope to instill a continuing interest in critical

subjects such as the sciences and engineering. Possible ideas include:

- Park rangers can use Corps engineering and other accomplishments to illustrate math and science concepts. For example, students can use calculations to determine water quality, water storage capacity, wildlife populations and projected visitation of publiclands.

- Special events are a valuable opportunity for the Corps to reach out to the local community and involve visitors at our projects. Corps team members should encourage public participation in special events such as Public Lands Clean-up Day, Earth Day, National Safe Boating week, etc.

- Ensure that special programs in which we become involved have continuity. Public involvement in such programs can grow from one year to the next.

- Provide support to the Interpretive Services and Outreach Program by making educators and group leaders aware that we are available to assist them. Example: Contact schools and ask how we can supplement their curriculums.

- Develop opportunities for outreach partnerships with other State and Federal agencies and nonprofit conservation and safety organizations. Examples: develop opportunities for volunteers and students to (1) work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service or the Nature Conservancy to learn about and protect critical wildlife habitat and (2) participate in State water safety councils.

- Review all exhibits, programs

and publications to ensure that they are sensitive to the cultural issues of diverse groups such as African-Americans and American Indians. Example: Be on the lookout for phrases such as "When Indians lived here...." (They still do).

- Establish cooperative associations to improve services for visitors, especially, but not limited to, projects with information or visitor centers. Examples: Friends of Caesar Creek Cooperative Association and the Riverlands Association.

- Visit local guidance counselors and teachers to introduce them to career opportunities for students with the Corps of Engineers.

- Participate in career days and career fairs at local schools and colleges.

- Have rangers and others explain what they do and how they became interested in their career field as part of a lead into interpretive programs.

**6. To enhance the visitors' experience and enjoyment by anticipating their needs and providing interpretive resources to meet those needs.**

*"Most of our visitor conflicts occur because people just don't know better. We can use interpretation to educate them as to why we do or don't want them to engage in a particular action. Once they understand, they are usually willing to cooperate." Debra Stokes, New England Division*

*"Our interpretive program can empower the public with facts." Patrick McGinnis, St. Louis District*

The visiting public has needs and expectations. Our task is to anticipate and attempt to meet those needs whenever possible. These needs change depending on a variety of factors such as the season and/or location. The following ideas can be adapted for your project:

- Through visitor surveys, determine who our audience is:

*Who are they? (cultural background)*

*What are they doing? Where? When?*

*What are their attitudes?*

*What are their needs?*

- Cover basic needs for visitors such as locations of restrooms and food so they can concentrate on the message we want them to receive.

- Improve the standards of quality for nonpersonal interpretive services such as interpretive signs, project brochures, trail guides and audio-visual presentations. Encourage planners, designers, and managers to look to the interpretive section of the Corps of Engineers Sign Standards Manual and other current publications for guidance. Examples: Using quality graphics, provide an up-to-date, informative, interpretive project brochure for each water resource project. Encourage development of small visitor information centers at Corps projects that do not have authorized regional visitor centers. Insist on quality interpretive exhibits and services. Encourage use of exhibit companies that belong to the National Association for Interpretation to design, fabricate and install exhibits at Corps Projects. Also, when developing new

visitor facilities, insist that architectural and engineering firms work with the interpretive exhibit firm so that the building and the exhibits complement one another.

- Strive to develop and present the Corps story in a way that is free of barriers. Examples: For persons hearing impaired, use subtitles on audiovisual presentations. Some Corps team members should be trained in sign language. For persons visually impaired, use auditory messages and consider their needs while designing facilities. For persons with disabilities, integrate universal accessibility standards for access. For those for whom the English language is not their primary language, translate key information such as safety information, brochures and regulations into other languages.

- Make messages easier to understand. Example: Avoid using agency jargon or acronyms.

- Promote and nurture creativity among all Corps team members.

- Promote group unity and teamwork for more productive, successful group projects.

# CONCLUSION

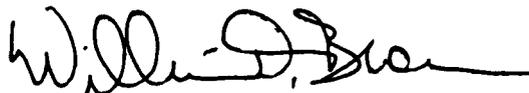
We hope this document has provided you with ideas for developing exciting interpretive and outreach programs. Some ideas may be new to you, some may not. These ideas are intended to help you link your programs to one or more of the goals outlined in ER 1130-2-428. But do not feel limited by the guidelines presented in this paper. Be creative and innovative!

As part of the Interpretive Services and Outreach program, the following materials and services are provided:

- Volume 1— Strategy and Goals
- Volume 2— Introductory Training
- Volume 3— Evaluation Procedures
- Volume 4— Environmental Education
- Volume 5— Source List for Exhibits
  - Hiram M. Chittenden Award Fact Sheet (FS)
  - Additional Resources (AR)
  - Database Instructions (DI)
  - Sample Job Standards (JS)

Interpreter's Handbook Series  
Interpreting for Park Visitors  
The Great Outdoors Fun Book  
Interpretive Database

FOR THE COMMANDER:



WILLIAM D. BROWN  
Colonel, Corps of Engineers  
Chief of Staff